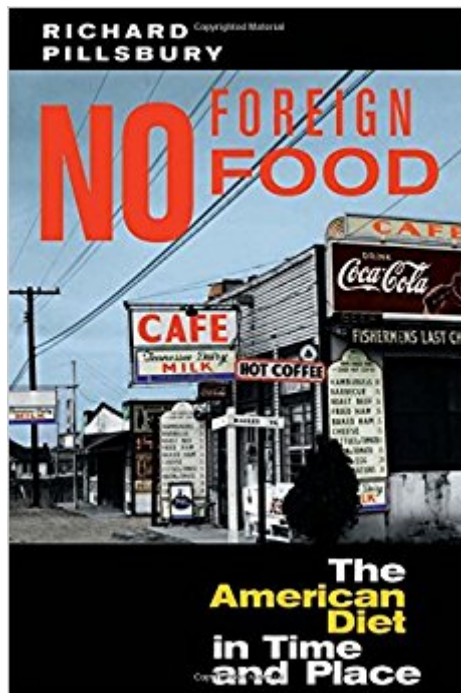




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No Foreign Food: The American Diet In Time And Place (Geographies Of The Imagination)



Synopsis

No Foreign Food explores the evolution and transformation of the American diet from colonial times to the present. How and why did our bland colonial diet evolve into today's restless mélange of exotic foods? Why are Hoppin' Jon, lutefisk, and scrapple, once so important, seldom eaten today? How has the restaurant shaped our daily menus? These and hundreds of other questions are addressed in this examination of the changing American diet. Appropriately, Richard Pillsbury reviews the colonial American diet and its evolution from its Old World origins to the impact of the Industrial Revolution on food. He emphasizes the roles of transportation development and technological change, the rise of great food companies, the changing role of the food distribution system, the impact of changing immigration patterns, and the ways that cookbooks reflect and shape our foodways. The book concludes with an examination of America's contemporary cuisine. Noting current trends at home and in restaurants, Pillsbury reflects on the changing character of the new American diet, the growing nationalization and declining regionalization of what and how we eat, and a future where there is no foreign food.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In No Foreign Food, Richard Pillsbury examines the evolution of the American way of eating, from the foods we eat to the times and places in which we eat them. Using graphs, figures, maps, and even reproductions of old "American" recipes (Brunswick Stew, Hoppin' John, Aebleskivers, and a

terrific comparison of gumbos from 1872 to 1996), Pillsbury, a geographer, shows how each wave of immigration has brought with it new tastes to be mixed in the melting pot and how the industrial revolution, the advent of prepared foods, and the rise of marketing have all contributed toward shaping our daily menus. He explores how the Americanization of previously "ethnic" foods allows them to move quickly into our standard diet, allowing the customer who claims to eat "no foreign food" to order spaghetti or a sausage in any truck stop he finds.

Pillsbury (Georgia State Univ.; *From Boarding House to Bistro*, Routledge, 1990) gives us an entertaining and informative look at what our food choices say about us as a society. He examines many aspects of the food industry, including restaurants, supermarkets, cookbook publishing, agriculture, and food processing. Social issues such as immigration and changes in the structure of American families are also considered. In looking at such a broad range of factors, Pillsbury provides a concise summation of many trends that affect America's food choices and offers a history of the development of various foods and food technologies. The great weakness of his work, however, is that many of his assertions are not well supported with verifiable facts and that numerous tables of consumption figures are presented without sources. Recommended for specialized food collections. Mary Martin, CAPCON Lib. Network, Washington, DC Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book presents a concise and clear overview of food habits and customs in the United States. Pillsbury examines regional food differences and traces them back to immigrant or even Native American customs. One of the more interesting aspects of the book is the documentation of how our ideals of what food was like for past generations differ from what they really ate. For instance, Pillsbury stresses the importance of corn meal-based baked goods in the traditional American diet instead of white yeast breads. He also points out how much greater variety of food we have available today, how much safer the food is in terms of contamination, and even how much safer cooking conditions are. The development of restaurants, supermarkets, and cookbooks are described in separate chapters. Contributions of various groups of immigrants are also highlighted, although the author makes no mention of South Asian immigrants, who are certainly beginning to have a noticeable presence in the Northeast. Overall, I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in food, food history, US history, or ethnic studies.

Given the academic qualifications of the author, I was expecting a more scholarly treatment of the

subject. What I found is a superficial treatment using personal observations with shallow interpretation. Worse, however, were the inaccuracies I spotted. The author confuses yams and sweet potatoes--attributing their origins to South America, South East Asia and perhaps Africa. So called "yams" in this country are sweet potatoes of New World origin. The term "yam" was coined by a clever marketing ploy to elevate the lowly sweet potato in people's minds. A true yam is botanically different and does not grow in this country. Another inaccuracy was the failure to distinguish tortillas from cornbread. Tortillas are made from lye-treated corn which changes the nutrient content in a way to prevent pellagra that was seen in other societies where corn was a major staple food, such as the American South. This is an important distinction. After noting these shortcomings I don't trust anything else in the book that I cannot verify through other sources. The best part of the book is the extensive bibliography at the end.

The text is slightly slow at times, but for the cultural geographer, anthropologist, or cook, it is incredibly insightful. It is repetitious, but that theme reflects american foodways.

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